ATARI FORCE™

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ATARI FORCE

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CONSIDER THEM CLOCKWISE, THESE BRAVEST OF A FUTURE EARTH'S SONS AND DAUGHTERS:
MARTIN CHAMPION--MISSION COMMANDER.
MOHANDAS SINGH--FLIGHT ENGINEER.
LUCAS ORION--MEDICAL OFFICER
LI SAN O'ROURKE--SECURITY OFFICER.
LYDIA PEREZ--PILOT, EXECUTIVE OFFICER.

ATARI FORCE™

I--I GUESS I OUGHT TO BELIEVE IT-- BUT SOMEHOW, I CAN'T!

AND YET THE EVIDENCE IS THERE, DR. ORION-- FOR THE DISCERNING EYE TO SEE!

SURE AND IT'S PINK ELEPHANTS WE'LL BE SPYING NEXT, TO MY WAY OF THINKING!

IN THIS LEAGUE, O'ROURKE, ANYTHING CAN HAPPEN!

STOW THE SCUTTLEBUTT, CREW! IF WE DON'T KEEP ON OUR TOES--

--THINGS COULD GET SLIGHTLY DEADLY!

THE YEAR IS 2005 A.D.--IF, INDEED, TIME ITSELF HAS ANY MEANING ON BOARD THE SHIP CALLED SCANNER ONE--

--THE *MULTI-DIMENSIONAL WARP-DRIVE CRUISER* WHICH PROPELS THESE FIVE SKILLED AND DEDICATED DAREDEVILS THROUGH LAYER UPON LAYER OF *ALTERNATE REALITIES.*

A BILLION BILLION *UNIVERSES*, IMPALED LIKE SHINING PEARLS ON AN INVISIBLE STRING, EACH EXISTING AN INFINITESIMAL *HEARTBEAT* FROM THE NEXT.

YOU'RE RIGHT, LUCAS. IT *IS* HARD TO ACCEPT THE FACT THAT WE'RE ACTUALLY TRAVELING *BETWEEN* REALITIES--PASSING FROM *ONE* COSMOS TO *ANOTHER!*

AFTER ALL, JUST A COUPLE OF DECADES BACK, THIS KIND OF THING HAPPENED ONLY IN *MOVIES* WHICH HAD GONE OVERBOARD ON *SPECIAL EFFECTS*--

--AND NOW HERE WE *ARE*, AND ALL WE CAN THINK OF IS GETTING *THROUGH* IT, SO WE CAN GET ON WITH *BUSINESS!*

CHAPTER ONE:

ENTER--THE DARK DESTROYER!

SPEAK FOR *YOURSELF*, MARTIN-- OR MAYBE I SHOULD MAKE THAT *COMMANDER CHAMPION!*

YES, I GUESS THAT'D BE *BETTER*, DOC--EVEN IF YOU AND I DO GO BACK A *LONG WAY.*

IT'D HELP REMIND US WE'RE ON AN IMPORTANT *MISSION* FOR THE INSTITUTE, NOT A *PLEASURE CRUISE!*

FINE BY *ME*-- BUT ALL THIS STILL GIVES ME THE *WEIRDEST* FEELING I'VE HAD SINCE I WAS A BOY BACK IN *DETROIT.*

I DON'T KNOW--IT'S ALMOST *RELIGIOUS*, SOMEHOW--

--LIKE SEEING THE *HAND OF GOD*, WITH THE STARS SLIPPING THROUGH HIS FINGERS LIKE SO MUCH *DUST!*

FUNNY! I LOOK OUT THERE, AND ALL I THINK OF IS *FUNDAMENTAL QUANTUM PHYSICS.*

WE'VE ENTERED THE THEORETICAL *TACHYON STREAM*, WHERE NOTHING CAN MOVE *SLOWER* THAN LIGHT--THAT'S ALL!

YOU KNOW, YOU *INTEREST* ME, PEREZ...

SOMEWHERE *BENEATH* THAT COLD EXTERIOR, I'M ALMOST POSITIVE THERE'S WHAT THEY USED TO CALL A *WARM AND WONDERFUL HUMAN BEING.*

I'VE GOT TO REMEMBER TO *THERMO-BLAST* FOR IT, WHEN WE GET BACK *HOME.*

IF WE GET HOME, COMMANDER --REPEAT, *IF*--

--AND RIGHT NOW, WITH ALL THE *STRESS FACTORS* OUR SHIP IS UNDERGOING IN OUR LITTLE *HYPER-SPACE HOP*--

--I'D SAY THAT WAS SHAPING UP AS A MIGHTY *SIZABLE* CONJUNCTION!

PERHAPS, MS. PEREZ! STILL, MY OBSERVATIONS CONVINCE ME THE SHIP'S STRUCTURAL ENGINEERING IS QUITE *SOUND*.

ELSE, WE WOULD *HARDLY* HAVE BEEN SENT UPON THIS QUEST FOR *PARALLEL WORLDS* WITH NATURAL RESOURCES TO AUGMENT OUR OWN.

THAT'S QUITE A *MOUTHFUL*, LADDIE...

...THOUGH I NOTICED THAT *YOU* WERE AFTER DOING A BIT OF STARING, AS WELL!

I WAS MUSING ON HOW THIS SUPPORTS MY *VEDIC PHILOSOPHY*... OF A SUCCESSION OF WORLDS AND COUNTLESS *REINCARNATIONS*.

MAYBE WE'LL FIND *MORE* ON THIS JAUNT THAN THE ANSWER TO A FEW *SHORTAGES* BACK HOME.

THAT WOULD BE QUITE *ENOUGH* TO JUSTIFY-- ;UNNNH!;

CHAMPION! WHAT'S *HAPPENING??*

I--I DON'T *KNOW*, LYDIA! ALL OF A SUDDEN, I'M HAVING TO *FIGHT* THE CONTROLS.

IT'S AS IF SCANNER ONE WAS BEING *SLAMMED*-- BY SOMETHING *OUTSIDE THE SHIP!*

OUTSIDE!? BUT WHAT COULD POSSIBLY--?

LIKE I SAID-- I *DON'T KNOW!*

BUT I DO DISTINCTLY RECALL ASKING THE *REST* OF YOU GLORY-HOUNDS TO *STRAP YOURSELVES IN* WHEN WE ENTERED HYPERSPACE!

I FEAR, COMMANDER, THAT OUR *CURIOSITY* FAR EXCEEDED OUR *PRUDENCE!*

O'ROURKE! YOU'RE THE *OLYMPIC ATHLETE* OF THIS LITTLE GROUPING.

THINK YOU CAN *STOP* MOHANDAS, BEFORE HE GOES *SPLAT* ALL OVER OUR NICE SHINY *COMPUTER COMPONENTS?*

SURE AND WHAT KIND OF *SECURITY OFFICER* WOULD I BE NOW IF I *COULDN'T?*

BUT-- *DOCTOR ORION--*

--LUCKED OUT ON HIS *OWN,* THANKS!

BUT, MARTIN-- *COMMANDER--* WHAT'S *GOING ON* OUT THERE?

IT FELT AS IF SOMETHING JUST REACHED OUT AND *GRABBED* SCANNER ONE!

THAT'S JUST *IT,* DOC!

SOMETHING *DID--*

EVEN AS COMMANDER CHAMPION CRIES OUT IN SURPRISE, THE ATARI INSTITUTE COSMO-CRAFT COMES ABRUPTLY TO A *DEAD STOP*..

--IN AN EERIE SECTOR OF DIMENSIONAL SPACE WHERE A VAST *BLACK NEBULA* SEEMS TO BLOT OUT STARS, PLANETS, AND ALL OTHER PHYSICAL PHENOMENA!

--BUT I'LL BE **HANGED** IF I'VE GOT THE SLIGHTEST IDEA WHAT IT **IS**!

HITTING THE *OUTSIDE VIEWER* BUTTON, HE SEES THAT THE SHIP HAS BEEN SEIZED BY A MONSTROUS, WORLD-DWARFING *TENTACLE*--

--NOR IS IT THE *ONLY* SUCH TENDRIL WHICH REACHES FOR SCANNER ONE FROM THE VERY *HEART* OF THE DARK, FORBIDDING NEBULA!

AND *WITHIN* THAT CLOUD OF GAS AND DUST A SPREADING *RED STELLAR GLOW* WHICH RESEMBLES NOTHING SO MUCH AS A *HUGE AND ANGRY EYE!*

TRY THE RETRO-ROCKETS!

MAYBE WE CAN BLAST OUR WAY FREE!

NO GO, LYDIA!

I'VE GOT THEM SET AT FULL POWER--

--AND THAT THING OUT THERE STILL HAS US IN A GRIP AS TIGHT AS A BANKER'S FIST!

LOOK AT IT--!

IT'S LIKE SOME ENORMOUS OCTOPUS-- THE SIZE OF A SMALL PLANET!

UH-OH! OUTSIDE SENSORS SHOW AN INCREASE IN EXTERNAL PRESSURE!

THIS THING'S TRYING TO CRUSH US!

WE'LL POP LIKE AN EGGSHELL!

ONLY ONE SLIM CHANCE-- AND IF IT BACKFIRES, THE ENERGY RELEASE COULD FRY US!

I'M ACTIVATING OUR ATARI 8000 CONTROL COMPUTER!

GREETINGS, COMMANDER. TROUBLE?

COMPUTER, YOU'RE THE "MIND" OF SCANNER ONE--

--YOU KNOW WE'RE IN TROUBLE!

CAN WE THROW IN OUR DIMENSIONAL WARP ENGINES WITHOUT OVERLOADING OUR POWER SYSTEM?

AFFIRMATIVE, COMMANDER.

THEN DO IT!

MMM

HEY! IT'S WORKING - THE POWER SURGE WAS TOO MUCH FOR THAT OVERGROWN SLUG TO STAND!

CHAMPION, WE'VE BROKEN FREE!

THERE'S JUST ONE SMALL PROBLEM!

WITH THE DIMENSIONAL WARP ENGINE RUNNING AT FULL POWER, WE CAN'T CONTROL OUR FLIGHT THROUGH THE MULTIVERSE!

WE'RE VANISHING INTO THE SPACE-TIME STREAM--

--AND HEAVEN ONLY KNOWS WHERE WE'LL COME OUT--!

AND IN THE HEART OF THE DARK NEBULA, A SEETHING MASS OF INHUMAN FLESH SEEMS ALMOST TO SHIVER WITH DISAPPOINTMENT--

--AS ITS PREY DISAPPEARS IN A BLINK OF THE COSMIC EYE!

CHAPTER TWO:

PLANET OF THE DOOMED!

FOR MORE CENTURIES THAN HUMANKIND HAS BEEN CIVILIZED, THIS ONCE-FERTILE WORLD IN A STAR-SYSTEM NOT UNLIKE OUR OWN HAS LAIN FALLOW AND BARREN..

.. ITS SKIES A JUNKYARD OF ANCIENT, CRUMBLING SATELLITES.

...A SARGASSO SEA OF BROKEN DREAMS!

SUDDENLY--

WE'RE BACK IN NORMAL SPACE, COMMANDER!

THE ONLY QUESTION IS-- WHERE ARE WE?

WE APPEAR TO BE IN LOW ORBIT OVER AN EARTH-TYPE WORLD IN A DIMENSIONAL SYSTEM PARALLEL TO OUR OWN.

JUDGING BY THE SCATTERED DEBRIS--MUCH OF IT HEAVILY PITTED BY METEORITE IMPACT--I WOULD SAY WE ARE THE FIRST VISITORS TO THIS SYSTEM IN MORE THAN TWO MILLENNIA!

DOES THAT ANSWER YOUR QUESTION, MASTER PILOT PEREZ?

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT HER QUESTIONS, COMPUTER--

COMMANDER, WITTICISMS ASIDE--

--BUT IT CERTAINLY ANSWERS MINE!

--YOU SHOULD KNOW WE'RE STILL IN DEEP TROUBLE!

OUR DIMENSIONAL WARP ENGINES ARE CLOSE TO A BURN-OUT!

WE HAVE TO LAND FOR REPAIRS SOON --IN THE NEXT FIVE MINUTES--

--OR WE FACE *TOTAL DISASTER!*

YOU'RE THE *PILOT*, LYDIA.

TAKE US *DOWN*--SHE'S *ALL YOURS!*

AYE-AYE, COMMANDER. LANDING SEQUENCE *INITIATED*.

DOWN, DOWN--LIKE *ICARUS* AFTER HIS FLIGHT TOO NEAR THE SUN--*SCANNER ONE* PLUNGES THROUGH THE SCARLET-HUED SKY TOWARD A DESERT AS LIFELESS AS THE COPPER-COLORED PLAINS OF *MARS*...

YET, OBVIOUSLY, IT WASN'T *ALWAYS* SO.

CRUMBLING *TOWERS* GLINT IN THE MERC LESS LIGHT OF HIGH NOON, AS SAD AND LONELY AS THE WIND-CHIPPED FACE OF *OZYMANDIAS*.

BUT THE CREW OF *SCANNER ONE* HAS NO *TIME* FOR SIGHT-SEEING JUST NOW--

BWHIMP!

SKRASH!

--AS THEIR SHIP, BUILT TO WITHSTAND THE RIGORS OF *INTER-SPATIAL TRAVEL*, TESTS ITSELF AGAINST THE SOMEWHAT MORE IMMEDIATE DIFFICULTIES OF A *DESERT LANDING*--

--AND IS *NOT* FOUND WANTING!

A ROUGH RIDE AT THE *END*, LYDIA--

--BUT AS THEY *SAY*, ANY LANDING YOU WALK AWAY FROM IS A *GOOD* LANDING!

AMEN TO THAT, LUCAS!

HAVE YOU HAD A CHANCE TO CHECK FOR *LIFE READINGS*?

I'VE DONE NOTHING *BUT* CHECK SINCE WE *ARRIVED*, MARTIN.

USING THE *WRIST-COMP* COMMUNICATIONS LINK TO OUR *ATARI 8000 COMPUTER* BACK ON BOARD SCANNER ONE, I'VE ORDERED OUR MAIN *SENSORS* TO SWEEP THIS ENTIRE *HEMISPHERE*..

--BUT I'M AFRAID THESE *RUINS* ALREADY TELL THE TALE:

THERE'S ABSOLUTELY *NO SIGN* OF LIFE ON THE SURFACE OF THIS WORLD!

WHAT A *TRAGEDY*--TO COME SO FAR, ACROSS SO MANY *DIMENSIONS*--

--ONLY TO FIND A *GRAVEYARD* AT OUR FIRST--

EH?

YOU SAID THERE WAS NO LIFE ON THE *SURFACE*, LUCAS!

BUT WHAT ABOUT *UNDER-GROUND*?

GRRRUMMMBBLE

GOOD LORD! WHAT'S THAT?

POK!

HUKKA?

HUKKA-HUKKA?

WHY, IT'S ADORABLE!

DON'T ANYBODY MOVE! WE DON'T WANT TO SPOOK IT!

LOOK AT THE WAY IT'S STUDYING US!

ALMOST LIKE IT'S LOOKING US OVER..!

HUKKA?

HUKKA-HUKKA?

HUKKA!

MY GOODNESS!

CALL IT A WILD SURMISE, MOHANDAS--

--BUT I THINK HE'S IN LOVE!

WHETHER YOU WANT ONE OR *NOT*, MOHANDAS, IT LOOKS LIKE YOU'VE GOT YOURSELF A *PET*

OR MAYBE *HE'S* GOT *YOU*

LAUGH IF YOU MUST, MY COMMANDER

I AGREE WITH PEREZ--HE'S *ADORABLE*

THAT *TOWER* IN THE RUINS--

SURE AND HE'S A *DARLING* CREATURE--

--BUT HAS ANYONE BUT *MESELF* NOTICED SOMETHING *ELSE* SURPRISING?

-- 'TIS STARTING TO *GLOW*, AND I FOR ONE AM WONDERING *WHY!*

CAN IT BE THERE ARE STILL *PEOPLE* ON THIS BENIGHTED PLANET, AFTER ALL?

ONLY ONE WAY TO *FIND OUT*, O'ROURKE--WE'LL *INVESTIGATE!*

MECH-PROBE REPORTING AS ORDERED.

PEREZ, YOU STAY *HERE* WITH THE *MECH-PROBE* AND SEE TO THE *REPAIRS.*

AYE-AYE, COMMANDER

HE'S PAYING ME BACK FOR BEING *SO SHORT* WITH HIM--THE OVERGROWN *NAPOLEON!*

WELL, DON'T JUST HOVER THERE--

--GET TO IT!

MY, MY-- TESTY TODAY, AREN'T WE?

DON'T YOU KNOW IT'S BAD MANNERS TO SHOUT AT A MACHINE?

MASTER PILOT LYDIA PEREZ CHOKES BACK AN ANGRY REPORT AND MANAGES A SHEEPISH CHUCKLE INSTEAD...

.. BUT AS SHE WATCHES THE MECH-PROBE GO ABOUT ITS WELL-PROGRAMMED BUSINESS, HER GAZE AND THOUGHTS TURN TO HER FOUR FELLOW CREW-MEMBERS...

...AND EVEN THOUGH SHE ISN'T WITH THEM, SHE SHARES THEIR SENSE OF WONDER, AS THEY APPROACH THE SHADOWY RUINS OF A CITY THAT WAS GREAT WHILE EARTH ITSELF WAS YET UNBORN...

THE ATARY 8000 HAS SCANNED THESE STRUCTURES, MARTIN--

--AND ESTIMATES THEIR AGE AT WELL OVER 15 BILLION YEARS!

YOU'RE JOKING!

NOTHING'S THAT OLD-- IT'S INCREDIBLE!

HUKKA!

HUKKA-HUKKA!

MY LITTLE FRIEND WANTS US TO GO THAT WAY, MY COMMANDER.

PERHAPS HE KNOWS SOMETHING...?

BUT THE TOWER--

--IS IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION

REMINDS ME OF AN OLD-STYLE TV GAME SHOW!

"PICK CURTAIN NUMBER ONE, NUMBER TWO, OR NUMBER THREE!"

BUT WE CAN CHOOSE TO PICK TWO "CURTAINS"-- LUCAS AND I WILL CHECK OUT THE TOWER--

--WHILE WE THREE INVESTIGATE THE HJKKA'S TUNNEL.

DIVIDING YOUR FORCES IS POOR STRATEGY, COMMANDER

HJKKA!

HUMOR ME, O'ROURKE

THIS PLANET IS DEADER THAN LAST YEAR'S POLITICS

WHAT COULD HAPPEN?

I DON'T KNOW, COMMANDER, AND FRANKLY--

--'TIS THAT WHICH WORRIES ME!

DOWN, DOWN, DOWN INTO UTTER DARKNESS THEY CLIMB, LIGHTING THEIR WAY WITH A WEAPONS-LASER SET AT LOW ON A WIDE BEAM...

FOOTSTEPS ECHO FROM UNSEEN WALLS, AND SOME-WHERE IN THE FATHOMLESS SHADOWS, WATER DRIPS FROM AN ANCIENT LEAK.

AT LAST, WHEN IT SEEMS THEY'VE BEEN DESCENDING FOR HOURS, THEY REACH--

A DEAD END!

YOUR PET'S LED US ON A MERRY CHASE, FLIGHT ENGINEER SINGH. I HOPE HE'S ENJOYED HIS LITTLE JOKE AT OUR EXPENSE!

DON'T ALWAYS EXPECT THE WORST, O'ROURKE!

LOOK!

HUKKA! HUKKA-HUKKA!

THIS ISN'T A DEAD END, IT'S A DOOR!

AND HE WANTS US TO GO THROUGH IT--!

SET YOUR LASER AT MEDIUM HOT!

HSSSSS

SURE AND I'M A STEP AHEAD OF YOU, MOHANDAS!

WE'RE BURNING THROUGH!

GIVE IT A MOMENT TO COOL--

--AND THEN, LET'S HAVE A *LOOK-SEE* AT WHAT'S ON *T'OTHER SIDE!*

SWEET SAINTS OF OLD EIRE!

HUKKA-HUKKA!

MEANWHILE, TOPSIDE...

THERE'S THE *TOWER*, LUCAS.

FUNNY, BUT FROM *UP CLOSE*, IT DOESN'T LOOK QUITE AS *IMPOSING* AS I'D--

WHAT ON EARTH?!?

ZAM! ZAM!

SOMEONE'S SHOOTING AT US!

BLAM!

IS THE ENTIRE UNIVERSE MAD?

KRAK KRAK

WE COME IN PEACE -- WITHOUT INTENDING HARM TO ANYONE--

--YET WHEREVER WE GO, WE ENCOUNTER VIOLENCE!

LET'S SAVE THE PHILOSOPHY, LUCAS!

I DON'T THINK THOSE SHIPS COMING OUT OF THE SKY ARE PILOTED BY FOLKS IN A VERY THOUGHTFUL MOOD!

DUCK!

BOOM! BLOOM!

WHATEVER THEY ARE, THEY COULD SURE USE A FEW LESSONS IN FRIENDLINESS!

WHAT SAY WE GIVE THEM A FEW POINTERS, EH, LUCAS?

USE VIOLENCE TO FIGHT VIOLENCE?

NO, MARTIN-- I SAW TOO MUCH OF THAT ON EARTH WHEN I SERVED WITH A UNITED NATIONS "PEACE-KEEPING FORCE"!

WE'RE NOT TALKING ABOUT TAKING SIDES IN AN UGLY LITTLE THIRD WORLD CIVIL WAR, LUCAS--

--THIS IS A MATTER OF SURVIVAL!

MARTIN, MY FRIEND, I'M SORRY...

..BUT I'D RATHER DIE THAN FIGHT!

ZAM!

UH-HUH! YOU JUST MIGHT GET YOUR WISH, LUCAS!

THEY'VE GOT OUR RANGE, AT LAST--

SHWOOOSH!

WHOOOSH!

--AND THEIR NEXT BLAST SHOULD-- HUH?

THEY'RE FLEEING! BUT WHY? WHAT COULD HAVE--

--

FOR ONE SPLIT SECOND HIS *HEART* STANDS STILL, AND MARTIN CHAMPION IS STRUCK *SPEECHLESS*.

THEN HE *FEELS* IT, EVEN AS HIS *EYES* REGISTER THE SCENE BEFORE HIM:

RRR

RRUM

BL

E!

AND HE SHARES THE *TERROR* OF THE UNSEEN *PILOTS* IN THE ATTACKING STARSHIPS, AS A *VOICE* CRIES OUT, A VOICE THAT HE KNOWS IS HIS OWN.

THERE'S SOMETHING COMING UP OUT OF THE GROUND!

DEAR LORD, IT'S A SPACESHIP!

AND WHAT A SPACESHIP!

MARTIN CHAMPION HAS SPENT MOST OF HIS ADULT LIFE AROUND THE SPACE-CRAFT OF HIS HOME WORLD, EARTH, AND IN ALL THOSE YEARS, HE NEVER SAW ANYTHING LIKE THIS!

THIS IS A STAR FIGHTER-- A WEAPON OF SUCH SHEER DESTRUCTIVE POWER THAT WORDS CANNOT DESCRIBE IT.

BLAAM!

KRAM

KOOM!

LIKE SOME ENORMOUS *EAGLE* TAKING FLIGHT AGAINST ITS PREY, THE STAR FIGHTER SHOOTS SKYWARD FROM THE SHATTERED DESERT FLOOR.

CHAMPION ALMOST FEELS *SORRY* FOR HIS ENEMIES.

ALMOST.

CHAPTER THREE:

STAR RAIDERS!

WHOOM!

LORD!

THEY'RE GONE-- TWO SHIPS-- A THOUSAND TONS--

--BLASTED OUT OF THE SKY!

BUT WHAT ABOUT THIS NEW SHIP?

ARE THEY FRIENDS--OR A NEW SET OF ENEMIES?

ASK THEM, MARTIN--THEY'RE LANDING!

THE LAST TIME I FELT *THIS* NERVOUS WAS WHEN *PEREZ* AND I HELMED THE *LUNAR RESCUE MISSION*-- --AND TRIED *LANDING* WITH *DRY FUEL TANKS!*

WHAT ARE WE GOING TO BE *FACING*, LUCAS?

WHAT KIND OF *CREATURE?*

WE'LL KNOW IN *ANOTHER MOMENT*, MARTIN...

...THE COCKPIT HATCH IS CYCLING OPEN...!

WHRRRRRRRRR

TOP OF THE *MORNING* TO YOU, LADS!

GREETINGS, COMMANDER!

HUKKA!

LUCAS, THIS IS *ONE* EXPLANATION I CAN'T *WAIT* TO HEAR ..

SUNSET AROUND A SMOKING CAMPFIRE WHOSE SWEET SCENT REMINDS SOME OF THESE TRAVELERS JUST HOW FAR THEY ARE FROM HOME...

--AND WHEN WE BURNED THROUGH THE DOOR, WE FOUND THAT STAR FIGHTER IN A HANGAR ON THE OTHER SIDE, GLEAMING AND AS BRIGHT AS IF SHE'D BEEN BUILT YESTERDAY!

BUT 'TWAS NOT ALL WE FOUND...

...AND IN TRUTH, IT'S THIS LITTLE GEM WHICH IS THE MORE IMPORTANT FIND OF THE TWO, I'M THINKING.

THE HUKKA LED SINGH TO IT, AS SOON AS WE BREACHED THE DOOR.

A JEWEL?

WHAT'S SO IMPORTANT ABOUT--

TOUCH IT TO YOUR BROW, COMMANDER--

VISIONS...

--AND YOU'LL SEE WHAT I SAW WHEN I PUT IT TO MINE!

I SEE THIS PLANET, THE WAY IT WAS 15 BILLION YEARS AGO!

MAGNIFICENT.. A RACE REACHING FOR THE STARS!

THEY'D JUST TAKEN THEIR FIRST TENTATIVE STEPS OUT OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM--INTO INTER-STELLAR SPACE--

--WHEN THEY MET ANOTHER HOSTILE RACE--OUT OF A DARK NEBULA--

"--THE ZYLONS!

"THESE PEOPLE WERE PEACEFUL; THEY HAD ABANDONED WAR CENTURIES BEFORE AND WERE DEFENSE-LESS BEFORE THE ZYLONS' FIRST ATTACK!

"AS THE ZYLONS PULLED BACK TO REGROUP FOR A FINAL, DEVASTATING ASSAULT, THE GREATEST MINDS OF THE PLANET ASSEMBLED TO BUILD A WEAPON...

"AIDING THEM WERE THE HUKKA--

"-- A MUTANT LIFE-FORM FROM ANOTHER SOLAR SYSTEM, DISCOVERED DURING AN EARLY EXPLORATION!

"AT LAST, THE WEAPON WAS COMPLETE, NEEDING ONLY A CHARGING OF ITS NUCLEONIC BATTERIES TO BRING IT TO FULL BATTLE READINESS.

"IN SPACE, THE WEAPON WOULD RECHARGE AT A STARBASE ESTABLISHED BY EARLY EXPLORERS IN ANOTHER PART OF THE GALAXY--

"-- BUT IT NEVER HAD THE CHANCE..

"... FOR, IN THOSE CRUCIAL HOURS BEFORE THE WEAPON WAS FULLY CHARGED--

"-- THE ZYLONS ATTACKED!

"IN ONE INSTANT, THE EFFORT OF MILLENNIA -- THE ACHIEVEMENT OF EONS -- WAS WIPED OUT!"

WHOOM! WHOOM!

WHY THE ZYLONS DID WHAT THEY DID, NONE CAN SAY..

WHOOM!

"...FOR NONE BUT THE HUKKA LIVE TO TELL THE TALE!

"YOU SEE, THE ZYLONS USED A PARTICULARLY EVIL KIND OF BOMB--

"--ONE WHOSE SPECIFIC RADIATION WAS DESIGNED TO SLAY ALL HIGHER NATIVE LIFE UPON THE PLANET--

"--LEAVING IT A WASTELAND FOR ALL ETERNITY.

"AND SO IT'S REMAINED, FOR ALL THESE BILLIONS OF YEARS... A DEAD WORLD, WITH ONLY THE HUKKA LEFT TO BEAR WITNESS TO THE LOST GLORY OF A LOST RACE..."

ALL THESE YEARS-- THEY'VE KEPT THE WEAPON--THE STAR RAIDER-- IN PERFECT WORKING CONDITION.

THEY'VE BEEN WAITING--

--WAITING FOR THEIR FRIENDS TO RETURN...

...YET KNOWING THEY NEVER WOULD.

THE HUKKA LED US RIGHT TO IT, COMMANDER.

THESE PEOPLE LIE *BURIED* UNDER THE DEBRIS OF *EONS*--

--AND THE ZYLONS *LIVE!*

THIS WORLD CRIES OUT FOR *VENGEANCE!*

O'ROURKE, SINGH, PEREZ, ORION-- ARE YOU *WITH* ME?

VENGEANCE

AND, IN THE RESULTING RUSH OF ACTIVITY, NONE NOTICES THAT ONE AMONG THEM HAS *NOT* SEALED HIMSELF TO THEIR PACT...

BUT, RATHER, STANDS *BEWILDERED*, AS IF SUDDENLY FINDING HIMSELF LOST AMONG *STRANGERS*

FORTY M.NUTES *LATER--*

ALL RIGHT, LYDIA, THAT'S A *LIFT-OFF!*

WE'LL REMAIN IN CONTACT WITH THE REST OF YOU ABOARD SCANNER ONE VIA THE ATARI 8000--

--BUT RIGHT NOW, WE'RE PREPARING TO JUMP INTO *HYPERDRIVE!*

B'KAROOM!

ROGER, COMMANDER. GOOD HUNTING!

AND, AS THE PLANET DROPS AWAY BEHIND THEM LIKE A *JEWEL* INTO A WELL OF BLACK OIL...

WE'LL USE THIS *LONG RANGE SCANNER* TO PINPOINT THE NEAREST *ZYLON WARSHIP* ON OUR MAP SCREEN. AH.

I'M PICKING UP OUR IMAGE AT COORDINATES A-2.

AND SOMETHING *ELSE* IS COMING IN, O'ROURKE--

--THE *ZYLONS*, AT COORDINATES B-1!

SET THE *WARP CONTROLS* AT *WARP FACTOR ONE*--

WARP!

WAZOOM

THEY'RE ON OUR *SCREENS*, COMMANDER!

SURE AND 'TIS A *LOVELY* SIGHT--LIKE A MARAUDING *WOLF* AT BAY AND ME WITH A LOADED *SHOTGUN*!

YOU'RE COMMANDING *FIRE CONTROL*, O'ROURKE!

WHEN YOU'RE *READY*--

"FIRE!"

BLOW

BLESSED HILLS OF OLD EIRE, DID YOU SEE THAT, COMMANDER?

ONE ROUND AMIDSHIPS AND UP HE WENT LIKE A ROMAN CANDLE!

A FEW GHOSTS WILL REST EASIER TONIGHT, O'ROURKE.

LET'S KEEP ON HUNTING.

MEANWHILE, BACK ABOARD SCANNER ONE...

PEREZ, SINGH-- I'VE GOT SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU.

DOCTOR, I'M NOT EASILY SHOCKED--

--BUT YOU SHOCK ME!

IS THAT-- A DEAD BODY?

HUKKA!

SO IT WOULD APPEAR

I FOUND IT IN THE WRECKAGE OF ONE OF THE ZYLON WARSHIPS...

..AND AS YOU CAN *SEE*, IT'S NOT AT *ALL* WHAT IT SEEMS TO BE.

AN *EMPTY SPACESUIT?*

IS THIS A JOKE?

DOCTOR ORION ISN'T LAUGH NG, LYDIA

YOU ARE SAYING THE ZYLONS *DON'T EXIST?*

NOT *QUITE.*

LET ME EXPLAIN *FURTHER.*

I USED THAT *MEMORY JEWEL* O'ROURKE DISCOVERED--

--AND I *CONCENTRATED* ON REPLAYING THE *MOMENT* WHEN *THE ZYLONS* FIRST APPEARED IN THE GALAXY.

YOU RECALL--THEY CAME FROM A *DARK NEBULA.*

WHEN I *PROBED* THAT JEWEL-MEMORY WITH *MY THOUGHTS*, I SAW A *CREATURE*--A MOST *FAMILIAR* NIGHTMARE--

--THE *SAME CREATURE* WHICH ATTACKED US IN *INTER-DIMEN-SIONAL SPACE!*

OF COURSE!

THE ZYLONS ARE *CREATURES*--

--*MENTALLY CONTROLLED* BY THAT *MONSTROSITY* BEYOND THE STARS!

THAT MEANS *MARTIN* AND *LISAN* ARE FIGHTING A *HIDDEN ENEMY!*

ORION, SINGH-- *STRAP DOWN--*

HUKKA-HUKKA!

--WE'VE GOT TO WARP INTO INTERDIMENSIONAL SPACE AND TRACK DOWN THAT DARK DESTROYER--

VROOM!

--BEFORE OUR FRIENDS FALL RIGHT INTO ITS TRAP!

ONLY ONE QUESTION, MASTER PILOT...

IF WE FIND THIS CREATURE AGAIN-- WHAT THEN?

MOHANDAS, I WISH I KNEW...

INTERSTELLAR SPACE, A DOZEN LIGHT-YEARS FROM GALAXY QUADRANT A-Z...

STARBASE AHEAD, O'ROURKE...

...A PLACE TO RE-ENERGIZE BEFORE WE ENGAGE ANOTHER-- EH?

THE ZYLONS, COMMANDER!

THEY'VE FOUND US-- THREE OF THEM!

NO TIME TO WONDER HOW--!

BRACE YOURSELF--

--WE'RE TAKING EVASIVE ACTION!

BLAM

KZAM

WHAM!

NO GOOD, COMMANDER! WE'RE HIT!

THE WAY THEY MANEUVERED-- IN TOTAL COORDINATION!

IT'S AS IF ONE MIND WERE CONTROLLING ALL THREE WARSHIPS!

NOW THEY'RE CLOSING IN--

--AND IF THEY HIT US THAT WAY AGAIN--

--WE WON'T STAND A CHANCE!

SPACE OUTSIDE SPACE, TIME OUTSIDE TIME:

THIS IS THE INTERDIMENSIONAL LIMBO KNOWN AS THE MULTIVERSE AND THROUGH THIS UN-REALITY SCANNER ONE PLUNGES LIKE A DOLPHIN THROUGH TROUBLED WATERS..

I'VE RECHECKED THE PLAN TWICE WITH OUR ATARI 8000 COMPUTER, SINGH.

YOU HEARD THE DOCTOR, MOHANDAS.

HURRY.

IT'S OUR ONLY HOPE

WE'VE FOUND THE DARK DESTROYER, AND IT'S ONLY A MATTER OF TIME--

--BEFORE IT FINDS US!

LORD HELP US THEN!

DOCTOR ORION, PILOT PEREZ, I'VE REACHED THE PROBE POD, AS PLANNED.

THE POWER ACCUMULATORS ARE FULLY CHARGED.

AS INSTRUCTED, I'M SETTING THEM TO OVER-LOAD IN SIXTY SECONDS

OR, RATHER-- THE HUKKA IS

HE SEEMS TO UNDER-STAND WHAT WE'RE TRYING TO DO--

--AND HIS HANDS ARE EVEN FASTER THAN MINE!

HUKKA-HUKKA!

THAT CREATURE-- SO FANTASTIC, SO EVIL!

THIS CLOSE IT'S LIKE LOOKING INTO THE EYE OF SATAN HIMSELF!

IF THIS MONSTER IS CONTROLLING THE ZYLONS--THEN IT DESTROYED AN ENTIRE RACE FOR NO REASON!

HOW ELSE WOULD YOU DEFINE EVIL, DOCTOR?

SINGH HERE. READY AT THIS END-- GO!

AND, IN STELLAR SPACE--

WE'RE LOSING POWER

THEY'RE PLAYING WITH US, COMMANDER--

--A COSMIC GAME OF CAT AND MOUSE!

IT'LL BE FINISHED SOON, O'ROURKE!

BLAM

ANOTHER SHOT LIKE THAT AND WE'RE DEAD!

SCANNER ONE TEN SECONDS TO OVERLOAD, AND COUNTING...

WHAT ARE YOU WAITING FOR, PEREZ?

FIRE THE PROBE POD! FIRE!

SEVEN... SIX...

STEADY.. STEADY. I'M AIMING FOR THE "EYE"..

. LOCKED ON TARGET!

..FIVE.

...FOUR...

FIRE!

..THREE..

...TWO...

..ONE--

BHOOM

STELLAR SPACE...

COMMANDER, AM I *DREAMING?*

IF YOU ARE, WE'RE *SHARING* THE SAME DREAM, O'ROURKE!

THE ZYLONS ARE *CAREENING* OUT OF CONTROL!

IF THEY DON'T STRAIGHTEN THEIR *COURSE* IN THE NEXT SIX SECONDS, THEY'LL *COLLIDE!*

TOO LATE!

THOSE *FLASHES* ON THE MONITOR MEAN WE'RE *SAFE--*

--BUT *HOW* AND *WHY*, I COULDN'T BEGIN TO *GUESS!*

WE WERE *LUCKY*, O'ROURKE

AYE, THAT WE *WERE*, COMMANDER

IT WAS A *MADNESS* THAT CLAIMED US, A LUST FOR *VENGEANCE!*

I THINK WE'VE LEARNED OUR *LESSON*, O'ROURKE.

NOBODY *EVER* WINS AT WAR

AND SO...

WE WONDERED WHO'D GET BACK *FIRST*, COMMANDER.

IT LOOKS LIKE WE *BEAT* YOU.

MARTIN, MY FRIEND, HAVE *WE* GOT A STORY FOR YOU...

WHY THE *SMUG LOOKS?*

SOMEBODY BETTER *EXPLAIN*--

LUCAS, *YOU* CAME UP WITH THE PLAN.

THE HONOR IS ALL *YOURS*.

ONE BRIEF EXPLANATION LATER...

SO, WHEN THE *DARK DESTROYER* WAS BLASTED--

--THE *ZYLONS* JUST *COLLAPSED!*

IF YOU *SAY* SO, LUCAS. *I* SAY, IT'S TIME TO GO.

AH, COMMANDER --*THE HUKKA--?*

IF YOU TWO ARE SO *ATTACHED* TO EACH OTHER, SINGH--

--WELL, HE MIGHT AS WELL *TAG ALONG!*

HUKKA-HUKKA!

AS IF WE HAD A *CHOICE!*

AND, AS THE CREW OF *SCANNER ONE* JOINS TOGETHER IN HEART-FELT *LAUGHTER*, SOMEWHERE IN *THE MULTIVERSE...*

...WHERE A *DARK NEBULA* CHURNS LIKE A CLOUD TORN FROM THE HEART OF *NIGHT...*

...A *RED GLOW* SLOWLY BRIGHTENS, LIKE THE GRADUAL OPENING OF AN *ANGRY EYE...*

THE **ATARI FORCE** WILL RETURN-- IN "**PHOENIX**," COMING THIS FALL!

ATARI FORCE FACT FILE:

#1 COMMANDER MARTIN CHAMPION

NAME: MARTIN CHAMPION
AGE: 34
HEIGHT: 6'3'' WEIGHT: 105 KILOS
NATIONALITY: POLISH-AMERICAN
PREVIOUS ACCOMPLISHMENTS: CHAMPION WON THREE GOLD MEDALS IN THE 1996 OLYMPICS; HE CO-COMMANDED THE MOON COLONY RESCUE MISSION IN 1999; HE COMMANDED THE SECOND MARS MANNED MISSION (2002-2004); HE HAS DEGREES FROM CALTECH, M.I.T., AND PRINCETON; HE IS A GRADUATE OF THE SPACE ACADEMY AT COLORADO SPRINGS.
POSITION: MISSION COMMANDER
REMARKS: IN ANY OTHER MAN, CHAMPION'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS MIGHT HAVE RESULTED IN THE CREATION OF AN OVERBEARING EGO; CHAMPION REMAINS REMARKABLY UNAFFECTED, AND AT TIMES SEEMS ALMOST BOYISH; YET HIS COOL, CONFIDENT MANNER MAKES HIM A PERFECT LEADER, AND INSPIRES THE LOYALTY OF HIS FELLOW EXPLORERS . . .

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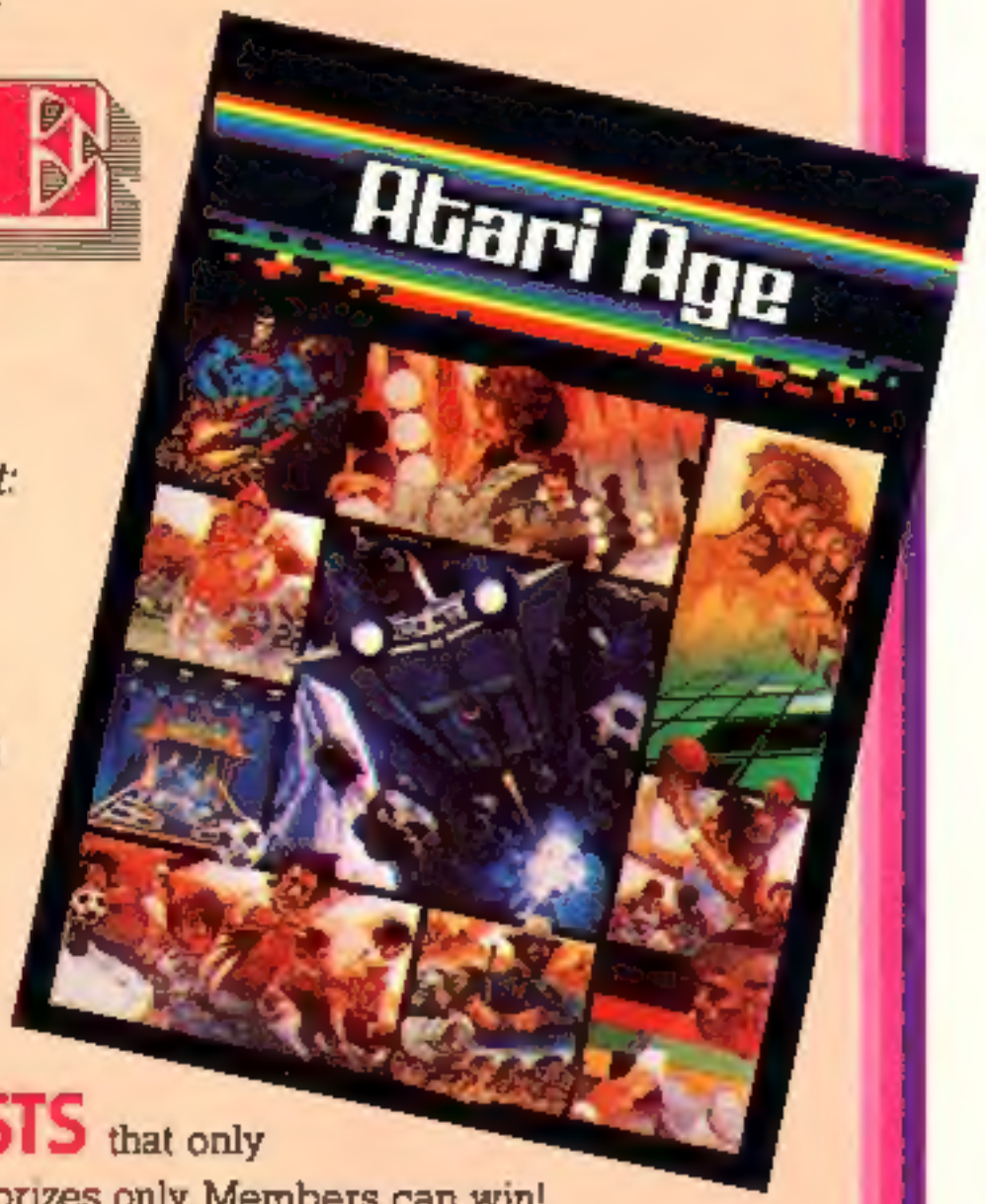

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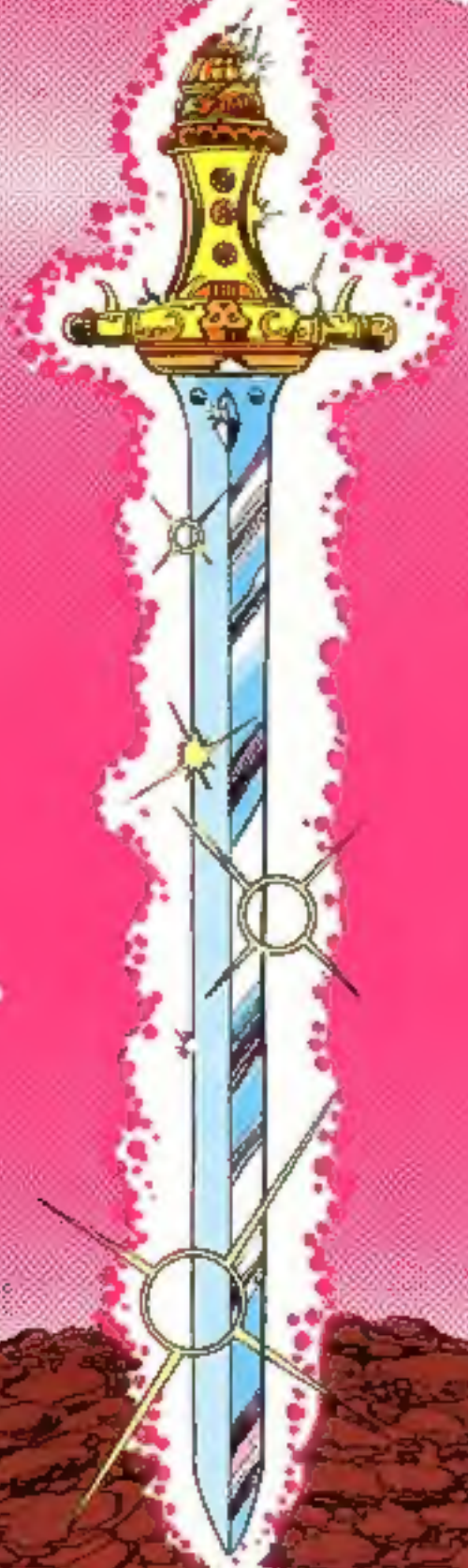

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